

Animal Care Stakeholder Update

I hope the subject line of this e-mail intrigues you long enough to take a few minutes and read this first-ever electronic stakeholder update from Animal Care (AC), a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). You're receiving this e-mail because you're one of our valued stakeholders, and we want to keep you informed of the latest AC news and information.

As a stakeholder, you are probably aware that AC regularly receives requests for copies of inspection reports for zoos, circuses, research facilities, breeding operations and other licensees and registrants regulated by AC under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). Currently, these inspection reports are only available by sending a written request to APHIS' Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) office. This inaugural electronic update is to inform you that beginning March 15, 2005, AC will be making regularly requested inspection reports accessible on its Web site at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ac>.

While initially only regularly requested reports will be accessible, the goal is to eventually make all inspection reports available. This effort is a work in progress because the FOIA office must analyze every inspection report on a line-by-line basis to ensure that personal and confidential information is protected and removed from government documents before they are released to the public. This is in accordance with FOIA, which was established to shed light on how government Agencies perform their statutory duties.

A new AC database that will house all information related to inspection reports, registrants and licensees is currently under construction. This will enable FOIA staff to more quickly review and redact information electronically. When complete, the database will give AC the capacity to make more inspection reports Web accessible. It should be noted, however, that this database is only in the early phases of construction and won't be fully operational until fiscal year 2006.

Instead of waiting for the new database to be completed, AC and our FOIA office made the decision to make regularly requested inspection reports available now as part of our ongoing effort to provide more information to stakeholders in a timely manner. This commitment also is in keeping with FOIA guidelines for the release of commonly requested information to the public.


Once the new database is complete, AC and our FOIA office will focus on reviewing and posting inspection reports where licensees and registrants were found to be in full compliance with the AWA's minimum standards of care for regulated animals. This will be followed by a review of all inspection reports where non-compliant items were identified. These reports take longer to examine, which is why it will take more time for them to be made Web accessible.

To submit a written request for an inspection report not available on the AC Web site or for other AC records, you can send an e-mail to foia.officer@aphis.usda.gov, fax your request to 301-734-5941, or mail your request to 4700 River Road, Unit 50, Riverdale, MD 20737.

As mentioned earlier, this is only the first of many updates to come. From new regulations to significant AC personnel and organizational changes, our goal is to provide you with a brief overview of what's happening and then refer you to the AC Web site and other sources for additional information. Through these updates, you'll be among the first to learn of new AC initiatives. We hope you find this resource as beneficial as we think it's going to be.

To add or remove a name from this update, e-mail ac.stakeholders.update@aphis.usda.gov. Suggestions for future updates are encouraged and can be sent to the same address. We also want to know what you think of this first update, so please send us your comments, reactions, and feedback.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chester A. Gipson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chester Gipson, DVM
Deputy Administrator